

THE INDYPENDENT

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THE INDYPENDENT



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WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 120 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Indypendent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Indypendent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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TOPLESSNESS ABOUNDS: (left) The typical Mermaid Parade paparazzi. PHOTO: BENNETT BAUMER. (Right) Celebrating the end of Dyke March in Washington Square Park. PHOTO: KAITLYN TIKKUN.



Getting Wet with Dykes & Mermaids

BY AMY WOLF

On Fifth Avenue between 17th and 18th St., a woman 10 stories up repeatedly flashed her breasts to thousands of dykes. Waves of cheering matched the undulation of her shirt. "It's not a girls gone wild thing, it's a dyke love thing," said marcher Liz Mauer.

A few hours prior on the Coney Island boardwalk, mer-exhibitionists showed off their bodies and costumes to whomever showed up to the wetter-than-usual Mermaid Parade. As the fair-weather crowd passed, the hordes of mostly male photographers were unphased.

What do these events share? "If I said freaks, I would mean it in the most beautiful way possible," said Karen, a lesbian marcher.

Another dyke marcher added, "You don't get to see hot glitter-bedazzled wonderful fatness other places. Both parades allow a space for it."

Critics have taken the Mermaid Parade to task for promoting nothing more than beauty-pageant feminism; clearly exhibited in a pod of French "Mer-Maids."

Those who parade tend to see it in a more sex-positive light. "I have big tits and I love them and I like to show 'em. I love the creativity of the nudity," said Sarah Kornbluth of Brooklyn.

Some topless attendees at the Dyke March let their breasts out and sported heels to enhance the visibility of femmes (and femininity) in the dyke community.

Why? "There is a lot of femmephobia in the dyke community, there is a fear among some that I would leave them for a man," offered one marcher.

The Dyke March was started in the early

nineties by the Lesbian Avengers to create a space outside of the male-dominated gay pride.

The Dyke March also shuns corporate funding, which is more radical, but results in poor publicity of the event. With no PR and a steady drizzle, the march down Fifth Ave. to Washington Square Park gathered more perplexed onlookers than fans or foes.

So without an audience, with whom are you communicating? At the Dyke March, the answer is each other. Nancy, a 60-something dyke and her partner were there to represent the needs and concerns of retiring queers. Their primary audience was the queer community. The parade also becomes a good excuse to bring dykes out for the parties and socials that follow.

Although the Mermaid Parade is more pageantry than politics, Kali, the Killer of Demons of the Bollywood Bomb-Shells, wore the heads of Bush, Cheney and Condi on her belt. Second place in the human-powered float category was captured by a mermaid cuffed and chained to the planks. Her name was Native American Mermaid and she was to be sold to the highest bidder.

Nudity can be transgressive and political, but it doesn't have to be. For two women dressed in nothing but thongs and wide-holed fishnet body stockings, it's because, "you got to have fun."

"It's not exactly feminist but there are a lot of strong powerful women here and strong powerful men," said Megan, one of the parade-goers.

On any summer weekend at Coney Island, it will smell like hot dogs, but the Mermaid Parade, was a bigger sausage-fest than usual. Photographers jockeyed for the best shots in the waiting area before the parade. They

swarmed around sultry sea goddesses and tripped over tails of those who didn't pique their interest.

Victoria, who has been attending the Mermaid Parade for eight years, said that "everyone I know has always brought a camera to the mermaid parade."

One shutterbug, Al Hirschberg, pointed out, "How else are you going to get this close to unclothed girls without getting slapped?"

"This is more about celebrating mermaids of the parade and the fantasy involved with that," offered Rocco Vernon from Brooklyn. He did not divulge what his particular fantasy entailed. Bones, a Coney Island native who grew up with the parade said it was "disheartening to see the creepy guys. Like the one guy who was actually wearing a video camera inside of his outfit."

Sarah Kornbluth found over 12 different pictures on flickr.com of her silver-painted body and amazing ta-tas from the 2005 parade. "I feel like if you are going to be in the parade, and if there are going to be photographers and journalists, that is completely legitimate and good."

Afterwards is a different story. Kornbluth said while lounging on the beach after the parade, she found it both inappropriate and intrusive that cameramen would follow, snapping shots of her tits without asking.

Emily Nepon, aka Killer, who attended both marches, said "I want men to take my picture and be lascivious to me, but they have to interact with me as human, not just my tits." She also mentioned that she overheard men giving a "running commentary on how they wanted to have sex with everybody." She paused, then added, "But, so was I."

Bennett Baumer contributed to this report. The name Liz Mauer is a pseudonym.



TENANTS TO RGB: Time for Home Rule

The final hearing of the Rent Guidelines Board was delayed for almost four hours on June 27 as irate tenants protested at Cooper Union in favor of zero percent rent increases and a home rule provision that would give the city full control over its rent laws. The RGB ultimately approved rent hikes of 4.25% for one-year leases and 7.25% for two-year leases for New York's approximately one million rent-stabilized apartments. "Even though we lost the rent increase battle, we moved forward a step in the battle for home rule," said Jenny Laurie, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Council on Housing.

PHOTO: JESS GARMAN

AFRO-PUNKS INVADE BROOKLYN

BY KAZEMBE BALAGUN

If your style is more incendiary revolutionary than flag-waving patriotic then make your way down to the Second Annual Afro-Punk Festival being held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music over the July 4th weekend.

This year's festival features great documentaries like *Negroes with Guns* (a biography of Robert F. Williams who initiated armed defense of civil rights workers) along with a retrospective featuring the films of Don Letts director of the cult classic *Dancehall Queen*.

The crown jewel of the festival is its namesake, *Afro-Punk*. The 66-minute documentary directed by James Spooner focuses on Black kids who embrace punk's D.I.Y. aesthetic. Featuring bands like Cipher, Honey Child and Tamar Kali, Afro-Punk is reflective of the growing influence of the black rock sound as evidence by the band TV on the Radio and the sonic-noise on Mos Def's CD *The New Danger*.

"More and more musicians are embracing a hardcore sound," says Jeremiah Hosea, bassist for a number of acts including Earthdriver and Tamar Kali. "I think there are linkages between the rock acts and hip hop performers."

While Afro-Punk has won critical acclaim on the festival circuit, its success is linked to its grassroots fan base. Afro-Punk has spawned Liberation sessions, bimonthly showcases of talent, in New York featuring underground rock acts, while the Afro-Punk website has created an international community.

"It was such a beautiful experience to go to Liberation sessions and see a sea of Black faces who GET it – who get that our creativ-



DON LETTS, One of the filmmakers featured during the Afro-Punk weekend.

>> Afro-Punk as a concept is embodied by Black people who openly embrace their identity and reject the status quo's categorizations and stereotypes of Black people and culture.

ity is limitless and doesn't have to be boxed into R&B or hip-hop or whatever other label the music moguls come up with to define us for their benefit," says Onome, a performance artist and songwriter who is promoting Afro-Punk at shows throughout the city.

Despite rock's origins in African-American culture, present-day Black rockers stand out and are often slighted in their own community. This "pink poodle effect" can be linked to the overarching influence of hip-hop, not only as the music of choice but the defining experience of Black people, particularly by MTV and BET.

"Afro-Punk as a concept is embodied by Black people who openly embrace the facets of their identity and reject the status quo's categorizations/stereotypes of Black people and culture" observed Onome. But what

about keeping it real? "I'm always bringing the funk while bringing the rock" says Hosea "When I'm on stage I'm proud to be playing this Negro-music."

This year's Afro-Punk Music and Film Festival will take place in multiple venues from June 30 to July 4. Things get started with DJ Spooky and Letts spinning at Southpaw in Brooklyn. On July 1, there will be an Afro-Punk album release party at CBGB's featuring Cipher, Tamar Kali, Slack Republic and Cutlery. Films will be screened at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, including a series of such classic and new documentaries as *Paris is Burning*, *Finally Got the News* and a preview of Spooner's new film *White Lies Black Sheep*.

For more info, see afropunk.com and bam.org.



Speaking for the Trees & Vegetables

DEVELOPERS EYE HARLEM GARDENS

Harlem gardeners and their supporters gathered June 25 at Nueva Esperanza, a community garden located at East 110th St. and Fifth Ave. to protest a possible bulldozing of this green space and 18 others like it in East Harlem. A total of 65 gardens around the city are at risk as their status remains undetermined.

PHOTO: ULA KURAS



SOUTH CENTRAL FARM BULLDOZED, BUT NOT WITHOUT FIGHT

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, 45 people were arrested June 13 when police shut down the 14-acre South Central farm, the largest urban garden in the country. Organizers have called for nightly candlelight vigils outside the destroyed garden.

PHOTO: LA.INDYMEDIA.ORG

For more information, see nyc.indymedia.org and la.indymedia.org.

Scalia Knocks Me Out

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

In a worrisome development, the new majority on the Supreme Court ruled June 15 in *Hudson v. Michigan*, that the exclusionary rule should not be applied to violations of the Fourth Amendment's "knock and announce" rule.

At issue, the Detroit police had a warrant, but they did not knock and gave Booker T. Hudson less than five seconds before barging into his unlocked house.

The "knock and announce" rule dates back to English common law. The exclusionary rule has been enforced by the Supreme Court since it ruled in *Weeks v. U.S.* in 1914 that without the sanction of exclusion, which prevents illegally obtained evidence from being introduced against a criminal defendant, the Fourth Amendment "might as well be stricken from the Constitution."

Fortunately, New York state has its own exclusionary rule so we are not directly affected by Justice Antonin Scalia's opinion. But New York does have a dangerous affection for "no-knock" warrants, which have proven deadly. Consider what happened to Alberta Spruill.

Ms. Spruill was a 57-year-old city employee who died of a heart attack on May 16, 2003, after police, acting on a bad tip, threw a concussion grenade into her apartment on W.143rd St.

Police had an affidavit from a confidential informant that a crack dealer lived in her apartment. It turned out the dealer was already in custody. The police did not bother themselves to go to her building and speak to its residents prior to the raid.

New York permits no-knock warrants to be issued upon a sworn statement that the police are looking for drugs or guns (usually drugs). No-knock warrants are supposed to be used only where there is risk that people will be hurt or evidence destroyed. But judges issue them routinely.

In City Council hearings held after Spruill's death, Police Commissioner Ray Kelly said that, of 13,000 search warrants obtained by police from January 2001 through April 2003, a majority were no-knock warrants. He admitted that in 10 percent of the cases, no contraband was found. In the first four months of 2003, police executed 1,900 search warrants and went to the wrong address four times. They used the "flash and bang" grenades 85 times in that period.

The Legal Aid Society proposed legislation in the City Council that the NYPD gather, record and publish statistics about its use of no-knock warrants so that the public can monitor the criminal justice system. Such a bill was introduced with 16 sponsors in 2003, but it was referred to the public safety committee where it died, never to be reintroduced.

The police now require that the use of a stun grenade be approved by departmental officials and supposedly began a program to track the results of warrants. But similar policies existed on paper at the time of the Spruill raid.

It is the ease of ignoring written directives that makes the exclusionary rule so necessary. Short of grievous physical injury and demonstrable innocence, most victims of illegal police searches receive no damages for the violation of their civil rights.

This is exactly what Scalia chose to ignore when he said "times have changed," and the exclusionary rule is no longer necessary.

The "knock and announce" rule didn't just serve the right not to be arrested in your pajamas. It protected the public from lies by confidential informants, inadequate police investigations, interagency miscommunication and outdated information. No-knock warrants only serve to increase the dangers to the public and to officers in the line of duty, and they should be issued sparingly, if at all.

Kolkata sex workers stand up for their rights even as the U.S. moves to defund international groups that refuse to promote abstinence-first policies. "We are the gatekeepers," says one activist. "Eliminate us and HIV and AIDS will spread even to the society of George Bush himself."

Sex Workers in the City of Joy

BY SARAH STUTEVILLE
& ALEX STONEHILL

KOLKATA, India—The smells of jasmine perfume, fried food, bidi smoke, and liquored breath mingle in the thick humid air. Watery pink and white neon lights from the Hotel Welcome, Dream House and Love Lotus shine in the eyes of women lined up in turquoise saris or red miniskirts and the customers jostling to admire them. Backlit in shadowy doorways, young girls beckon into the night with childish voices that betray their pre-pubescent, despite alluring gestures and deep purple lipstick.

Suddenly the mood shifts here in Sonagachi, Kolkata's largest red-light district, as an angry chant rises from the far end of the narrow street. The girls scramble to cover their faces with flimsy scarves and pimps in lungis and tank tops rush to their sides as thousands of women round the corner. Illuminated by torches that billow black smoke into the inky sky, the women stride forward with arms linked and scream, "We demand sex workers' rights!" and "George Bush, you can take our funds but you cannot take our fight," as they hold high a straw effigy of Bush.

GETTING ORGANIZED

The tradition of Kolkata sex workers taking control of their lives is as old as its first red-light district. Five miles away, in the slums surrounding the Kalighat temple, one of the holiest sites in Hinduism, lies the birthplace of the city's sex industry. Hundreds of years ago, widows and other socially outcast women would migrate here hoping for room and board from temple priests. While they were given a little food and a place on the floor to sleep, resident priests and upper-caste men who visited the temple often required sex as payment. Recognizing that demand for sex far exceeded the returns they received, these women began a community alongside the temple and started charging for their services, and organized prostitution was born.

While media attention on sex work in Asia often focuses on underage trafficking and slavery, it is more subtle social factors that push many women into the trade. The fight for legalization of prostitution as a means to expose trafficking, as well as

improve the lives of sex workers, is usually ignored.

"It's better to have a bad reputation than to be considered virtuous and be beaten every day," says Arti Pandey, 22 (name changed on request). Her story illustrates how prostitution can be a refuge from abusive families and limited economic options.

ONE WOMAN'S STORY

At 14, Pandey was married off to a man 20 years her senior who had designs on inheriting her ailing father's government job and a cut of his pension. When another sister's husband got the position instead, the abuse began. After learning that her husband was plotting to tie her up and feed her into a fan as retribution, Pandey ran away and began to support herself through a series of nursing and housekeeping jobs. But everywhere she went threats and demands for money followed, and her angry in-laws succeeded in getting her fired from every stable situation she found in Kolkata.

A trip to Mumbai changed the course of her life. There she met a friend who was working in a brothel and encouraged her to do the same. The wages the friend earned along with the promise of meeting interesting foreign men enticed her, and within months she was making a decent living. When a police raid returned her to Kolkata 18 months later, she attempted to resume "legitimate" work in a low-paying garment factory. But her in-laws soon found her out and began insisting that she return to them, for what Pandey saw as a life of further abuse and slavery.

"I realized that if I was going to live on my own I would have to return to the trade," a move that would sever her ties to mainstream society and by extension the in-laws. "This is one way you can choose to live your life, if you don't mind the work you can make a good living."

Last summer Pandey met a former sex worker turned peer educator for New Light, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides support for sex workers and their families. The woman helped her find a room, set her up as an independent operator in Kalighat and introduced Pandey to the organization. At New Light's office in the heart of the Kalighat red-light district, she receives regular check-ups, learns about safe



A ROOFTOP REFUGE Children play on a rooftop that is home to New Light, a non-governmental organization that has provided support for sex workers since 2001. These children would otherwise spend their evenings on the streets or sleeping under their mothers' beds while they see their clients. PHOTO: ALEX STONEHILL

sex practices, gets free condoms and has access to counselors and childcare. Even more important is the sense of non-judgmental support that the community of sex workers centered around New Light provides.

REMOVING THE STIGMA

Back in Sonagachi, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (Unstoppable Women's Alliance Committee) is taking a more militant approach to the problems facing sex workers. The organization is made up of current or former sex workers and their families and lobbies aggressively for the legalization of prostitution.

Current law does not explicitly state that prostitution is illegal, but criminalizes solicitation and the running of brothels or renting rooms to sex workers. The Women's Alliance maintains that any criminalization of sex work reinforces harmful stigmas, creates a black market where child prostitution and trafficking can thrive and promotes a climate where the protection of women who work within the industry cannot be ensured.

A new Indian law under consideration as an amendment to the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act seeks to prosecute the customers of prostitutes. Such criminalization and localized police raids in red-light districts have been linked to a decrease in condom use as the resulting scarcity of customers forces impoverished sex workers to agree to abusive or unsafe sex in order to support themselves.

Another concern is the insistence on language that equates prostitution with trafficking, denying the important role that of-age and by-choice sex workers can play in its eradication. The Women's Alliance has organized sex workers in red-light districts throughout the state of West Bengal and set up self-regulatory boards to oversee conditions in these communities in an attempt to improve wages and root out child prostitution and trafficking.

The Women's Alliance is not immune to criticism, and visible child prostitution on the streets that surround its main office is an obvious indicator of the limitations of self-regulation. It is estimated that one-third of the 9,000 prostitutes in Sonagachi are under 18.

The lack of programs to provide exit strategies from the trade does not address the socio-economic forces that lead women into sex work, and an unsettling conflict of interest is presented when the leadership of an organization profits from the business it

is attempting to reform and regulate.

Despite these concerns, the Women's Alliance is the most active and influential sex workers' organization in West Bengal. The loyalty it inspires is clear in the family-like atmosphere of its offices and the banners and signs carrying its logo that are displayed throughout Sonagachi. Its ability to mobilize thousands of women from one of the most vulnerable sectors of Indian society to march proudly through the streets to demand their rights is proof of the trust the group has earned and the movement it has ignited.

As dynamic as the movement for sex workers rights in Kolkata has become, its success still may rest on outside forces.

ABSTINENCE FIRST

The Bush administration has begun to cut funding from international organizations that condone prostitution and don't promote abstinence as a first defense against HIV and AIDS. The strengthening alliance between the U.S. and Indian governments has sparked fears that Indian laws will move to further criminalize prostitution, and the possibility of diminished international aid looms over projects like the Women's Alliance and New Light. Now it is not only the stigma of family and social disapproval sex workers must endure, but also the moralizing of a government and people that they will never meet.

For those working on the ground in places like Sonagachi or Kalighat, the first concern is that funding cuts and further criminalization will simply drive the sex trade deeper underground. While the Bush administration has been lauded for its efforts to abolish sex trafficking, organizations like the Women's Alliance and New Light often provide the only oversight in communities where women and children are being trafficked.

Furthermore, these programs have proven effective in promoting safe sex and slowing the spread of HIV and AIDS. Women's Alliance statistics report current condom use in Sonagachi at 89 percent and HIV infection rates among sex workers has stabilized at around 5 percent.

"We are the gatekeepers," says Roma Devnath, supervisor for the Women's Alliance Anti-Trafficking Project and a second-generation sex worker, "If you eliminate us, then HIV and AIDS will spread to the whole of society. Eventually it will even spread to the society of George Bush himself."

A longer version of this article appears at commonlanguageproject.net and SpreadMagazine.org



Without intervention, daughters of sex workers like these girls are likely to enter the trade themselves. PHOTO: ALEX STONEHILL

BY NEELA GHOSHAL

BUJUMBURA, Burundi—Looking at a map of the world you almost feel you can fit Burundi in the palm of your hand. Small, fragile, breakable, an Easter egg dipped by clumsy child-hands into dyes of uneven rainbow colors. Burundi: a baby bird still unable to fly. As if there is a risk of death at any moment. As if there is a chance it will blossom unimaginably.

Jean-Marie and I are standing near a map of Burundi when I ask where he is from. His fingers trail down the map as he talks.

"I am from Bubanza but I fled when I was 15. My whole family was killed. I was right there in the house when they killed them. This was the night in 1993 that President Ndadaye was assassinated, when mobs took to the streets and massacred the Tutsi civilians they held responsible, even if their victims, like my parents, knew nothing of politics. I escaped into the darkness, ran through the night along the banks of the river, was eventually picked up by the military and brought to safety with an aunt in Bujumbura. I no longer go back to my village; if I were to go, I would find no family there."

Jean-Marie now works as a mediator with the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), while finishing his thesis in psychology on the treatment of war-traumatized youth.

ACCORD is a South African-based non-governmental organization (NGO) where I am interning this summer, and its Burundi office conducts conflict resolution and mediation trainings for government officials and civil society. It also runs legal clinics providing advice and mediation services, largely addressing land disputes that stem from Burundi's successive waves of refugee outflows and returns.

Most of Burundi's refugees left in 1972, when the military, then a tool of the Tutsi elite, massacred over 100,000 Hutus in response to a Hutu uprising. Others left during the 1993 massacres, when it was mostly Tutsis who were targeted. Most began to come back in 2003 after the majority of warring parties signed a peace agreement.

Most of the time Burundi, proudly known here as "the heart of Africa," feels like a country at peace, a fragile peace. I attended a conference on economic development at which government corruption emerged as a topic of concern. The young Burundian banker I sat next to at lunch told me that in his estimation it's not President Nkurunziza himself who is corrupt, but the people around him. "Why doesn't he fire them, then?" I ask.

"Because then they will kill him," the banker says matter-of-factly.

BURUNDI: A Fragile Peace



MATTHEW SMITH

In March the United Nations and the Burundian government met to discuss the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Tribunal for prosecuting genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The process sounds good in theory, but dig below the surface and complications emerge. What will Burundi do about the fact that the current President, a former rebel leader, is undoubtedly responsible for war crimes? Will the only remaining rebel group, the Front for National Liberation (FNL), continue negotiating with the government if its members will face a tribunal? How can investigations be carried out in the context of ongoing insecurity?

Several Burundians I've spoken with are firmly opposed to prosecutions. "This is not Rwanda. In Burundi, Hutus committed genocide against Tutsis, and Tutsis committed genocide against Hutus," says a friend as we sit at the beach watching the tide come in and debating international law. "Now we just want to forgive each other and move on."

For several weeks we heard occasional shelling and machine-gun fire in the hills around Bujumbura: FNL attacks or renegade extremist elements of the army. This halted after the FNL signed a provisional peace agreement with the government in mid-June — a hopeful sign, though nothing is certain here.

In the evenings I look out from my patio at Lake Tanganyika, and the steel-gray mountains of Congo that form a wall on the other side. There are stories of a man-eating crocodile in the lake. Yet I go to the lake when I can and dip my feet in.

It will take much swimming against the current for Burundi to overcome the years of war, the ethnic mistrust implanted by the colonizers, the absence of regional role models for stable democracy and respect for human rights, the lowest per capita GDP in the world by some calculations. But once in Burundi's cool waters anything feels possible. You just keep moving — taking deep breaths. Knowing you might get sucked under. Knowing you might be just minutes away from the shore.

Neela Ghoshal is a graduate student at the Yale School for International Relations

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Theater for the New City
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Housing Works
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LGBT Center
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Brecht Forum
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14TH TO 96TH ST.
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Veggie Castle
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Spoken Word Cafe
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YWCA
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Elections

MEXICO LEANING LEFT

BY JOHN GIBLER

For the first time in Mexican history a presidential candidate who openly describes himself as a leftist has a good chance of winning the elections. Andres Manual Lopez Obrador, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) candidate and former mayor of Mexico City with an activist background in his home state of Tabasco, is running neck-and-neck against Felipe Calderon, the far-right candidate from President Vicente Fox's Party of National Action, as the July 2 vote approaches.

However, there is little that is leftist about Lopez Obrador or the PRD. They plan to follow the same macro-economic model as previous right-wing governments, promising only to "put the poor first" by flooding state money into infrastructure programs.

During the past six years the PRD has become something of a half-way house for disenchanted politicians defecting from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the dinosaur that ruled Mexico for over 70 years until its defeat by the National Action Party (PAN) in 2000. Many of the politicians that aided PRI president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) as he eviscerated the indigenous rights and land reform protections in the Mexican Constitution in order to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement, have fled to the PRD and found a home in Lopez Obrador's campaign team.

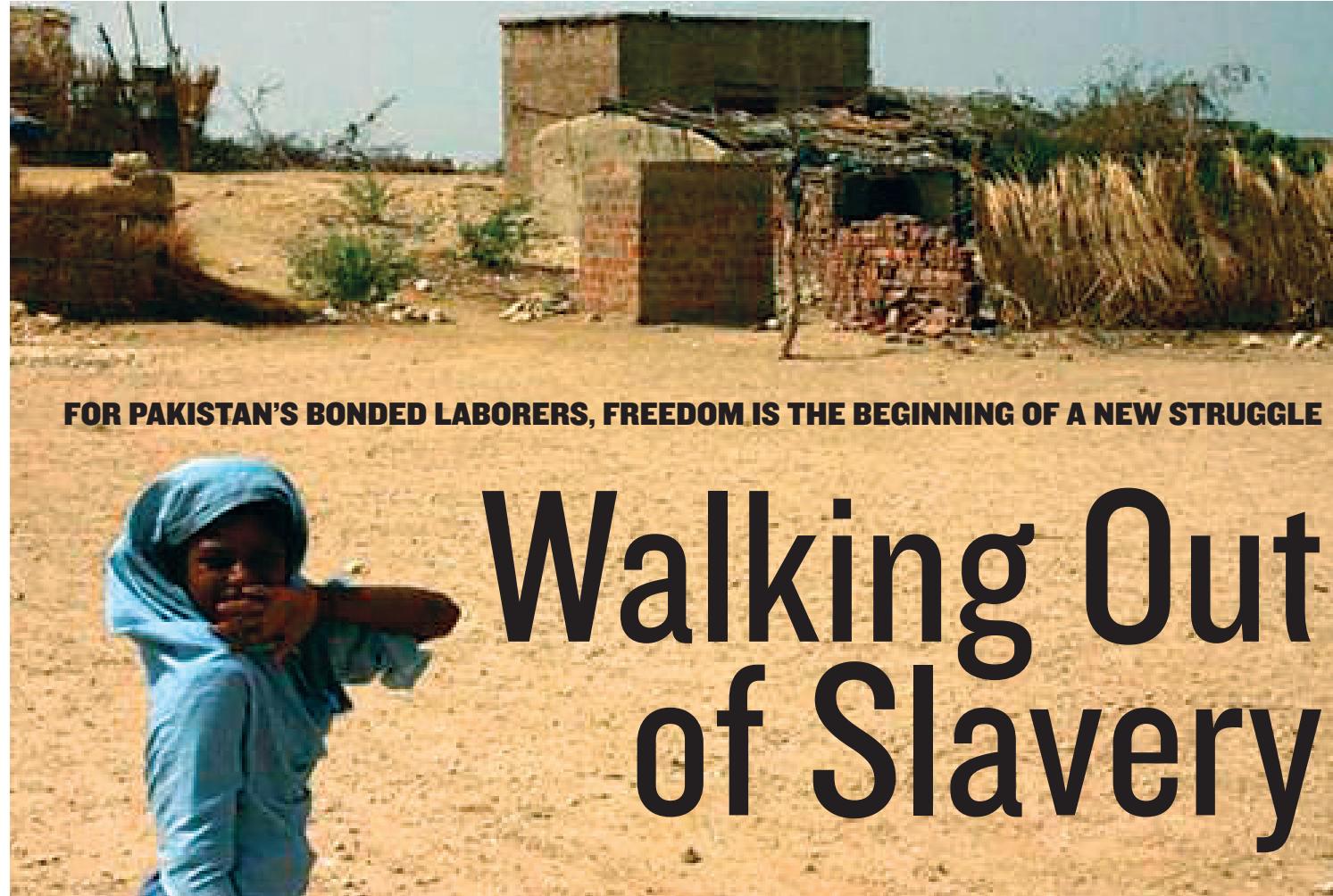
Many are able to ignore the uncomfortable details of Lopez Obrador's candidacy and economic program by focusing on the overall leftist framing of his campaign: the way to fight crime is by fighting poverty, creating employment opportunities and creating a just economy. One of Lopez Obrador's strongest points, however, is that he is not Felipe Calderon, who presents himself as an iron-fisted protector of the "rule of law," which in Mexico is code for a regime of violent repression and corresponding impunity.

It is very likely that Lopez Obrador's administration would be less corrupt and less bloody than one run by Calderon. In the context of seven decades of PRI dictatorship and six years of the PAN's special blend of ineptitude and cartel market economics, a Lopez Obrador victory would be a serious shake-up in the power struggles of the elite in Mexico. Add in the celebratory mood over recent left-wing victories in Latin America and it is easy to understand the combination of hope and delusion that accompanies Lopez Obrador's candidacy.

Thus, Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos' pointing out all the ugly particulars about Lopez Obrador, his campaign team, and the PRD has incurred the unique spirit of wrath reserved for spoilers. It is highly likely that a Calderon victory would unleash a tide of fury and resentment against Marcos and the Zapatistas, not criticism of Lopez Obrador's economic program, his ex-PRI campaign team, or his stilted, clumsy and facile campaign.

Few are those who are able to walk the middle path between the Other Campaign and the PRD, agreeing with the Zapatista analysis, supporting the Other Campaign, and planning nonetheless to wake up on July 2 and vote for Lopez Obrador. In the grand tradition of the left, most have chosen sides and curse their opponents as egoists and traitors. And the divisions are now deep.

Excerpted from a longer article that originally appeared at zmag.org.



TEXT BY SARAH STUDEVILLE

PHOTOS BY ALEX STONEHILL,
COMMON LANGUAGE PROJECT

Lahore, PAKISTAN—On the night of Oct. 1, 2005, in the tiny town of Jannat, one hour outside of Lahore, Shoukat Masih, 35, was fast asleep. He and his extended family had pulled their rusted charpoys out into the courtyard of their one-room home in order to enjoy the cool air and a night's rest before returning at dawn to another 12 hours of hard labor in the neighboring brick kilns.

Around 11 p.m. a group of men armed with pistols and sticks entered the courtyard and yanked Masih to the ground, shouting, "Are you the one making statements on the television?" His wife was in a neighboring village visiting family, but his father, children, nieces and nephews all looked on in terror as he was beaten to death on the packed clay earth.

The Masih family has spent decades trying to speak out against bonded labor, a system that kept them *harris*, or debt slaves, in Punjab's brick kilns for generations. The impoverished and uneducated family helped found a unique brick kiln workers' union, through which they file complaints that are largely ignored by government officials. But when Masih was sold by one brick kiln owner to another for \$3,300 without his knowledge or consent, his fury sent him to a local reporter.

FEUDAL SYSTEM

Eight months after Masih's death there have been no arrests, and his family holds out little hope that the case will ever be resolved—though not for lack of leads. Masih's father Naid is convinced that the men that killed his son were thugs hired by what he calls "the S.P. group," a secret organization protecting the interests of local brick kiln owners. Lawyers working with the family confirm the common belief that Masih died for speaking out against kiln owners.

Masih's case is not unusual in the struggle against bonded labor in Pakistan. The system is rooted in feudal traditions and religious prejudice against Christian and Hindu minorities and reinforced by a rigid class hierarchy that resembles India's caste system. Despite extensive laws banning bonded labor in Pakistan, the practice persists due to government corruption, a lethargic judicial system and societal apathy towards the issue.

Eleven years ago, violence against bonded labor activists made international news when 12-year-old freed laborer and activist Iqbal

entire families—including young children—are claimed as property.

Despite a flurry of attention at the time of his death, little has been done to eradicate bonded labor since. A campaign to clean up the carpet industry yielded some success, and a recent International Labor Organization effort has rid soccer ball manufacturing of child labor but bonded laborers in Pakistan's domestic industries, especially brick manufacturing in the north and agriculture in the south, continue to suffer.

"Most Pakistanis fund social service work through religious institutions, which by definition deal with Muslim populations and traditionally focus on the needs of widows, orphans or local schools," says Zafar Yasin, a Supreme Court Advocate who works on bonded labor issues. "Because laws already exist on the books banning bonded labor, many, when they think of bonded labor at all, see it as a responsibility of the government."

Masih (Masih, which means "Messiah," is a common name among Christian bonded laborers), was gunned down, presumably by the "carpet mafia" that he had recently escaped.

Even if offered freedom, some workers have no other economic options. But many do escape and are often hunted down by owners and forced back into bondage. Human rights groups have reported that landlords, particularly in rural Sindh, maintain private jails where errant laborers are kept. Local police and politicians often turn a blind eye to such practices due to strong ties with landowners.

"There is a general lack of comprehension of the dignity of ordinary humans among the government and upper classes here in Pakistan,"

LEFT: Naid Masih with a picture of his son, Shoukat, who was murdered last year for criticizing the bonded labor system. RIGHT: Brick production is simple but highly labor-intensive. Even for free laborers, working in this industry ensures a life of extreme poverty. The going rate for producing 1,000 bricks is 200 rupees (\$3.30).



This encampment in Secunderabad was founded more than a decade ago. It still has no infrastructure but provides a safe haven for freed laborers.

says Dr. I.A. Rehman, executive director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), when asked about the prevalence of bonded labor. "The mindset of the people in power toward ordinary human beings is very much like that of the factory owner toward his bonded laborers. In a country where no one even recognizes the right to work, it is hard to raise an awareness of these kinds of labor issues."

WE ARE SAFE HERE

A hot wind blasts across the yellow patch of parched land that is home to more than 1,000 families. Blue smoke rises from smoldering garbage piles that seem to have spontaneously combusted in the 105-degree-plus temperatures; plastic bags tangled in leafless shrubs wave like tattered flags; maniacal truck horns from a nearby road roll across the empty landscape. It may be desperately poor, but it was here, in this encampment outside of Secunderabad, in Sindh Province, that Hafeezan Nizamani found freedom.

"It was 1 a.m. when we snuck out," says Nizamani, speaking of the night her family escaped from bondage. "We heard that someone in Hyderabad could help us and we were very hungry and scared."

Nizamani had attempted escape three other times only to be caught, beaten and brought back to the sugarcane, rice and cotton fields that her family had worked under bondage for more generations than she can count. But on that night seven years ago, Nizamani, her husband and their six children made it to the local HRCP offices and were quickly ferried to this makeshift camp where they joined thousands of other recently freed *harris*.

That was about the extent of NGO support that Nizamani and her family received, how-

ever. This "free village" fends for itself, and most people live in basic mud huts without electricity, sanitation or regular access to clean water. Unemployment is over 50 percent, almost none of the 5,000 children attend school, babies are regularly stricken with fever, diarrhea and malaria, and there is no access to health services.

Despite these hardships, the free village offers protection against angry landlords who come looking for runaway laborers. Nizamani says this happens regularly enough that residents are afraid to leave its borders. But when the gun-wielding owners approach, the Muslim, Hindu and Christian villagers pull out axes, stones and any other weapons they can find and refuse to give their neighbors up. "Last month armed persons from the brick kilns came," but, she states proudly, "we fought back."

Life for Nizamani and her family is unimaginably hard. Her husband and 13-year-old daughter bring in the only income, 100 rupees (\$1.35) a day from the nearby cotton factory. She tries to send her three sons to the nearest government school and wants them to live "respected lives," but the cost of books and uniforms is prohibitive, and it is unlikely that they will receive a regular education. Nizamani dreams of a cement house, a private place to go to the bathroom and a regular water source, but she has little faith that anyone, whether the government or NGOs, will help her.

Still, her relief at being freed from bondage is palpable. The pink plastic bracelets that line her arms and announce her Gujarati heritage clack together with her gestures as she describes her previous life. She tells of no accounting of labor performed or salaries owed, only a crowded floor to sleep on and insufficient food. She saw her children wake at dawn

Musharraf to put an end to this practice," says Lali Kohli, a Courage Village resident and bonded labor activist who recently accompanied Sheikh on the peace march. "Many people are living in bondage and suffering. Only with international unity will we lift this curse."

LIFTING THE CURSE

Almost 30 miles away from Nizamani and her neighbors, Himatabad, or "Courage Village," offers a rare glimmer of hope in the world of bonded laborers.

It has one newly constructed street carved out of 25,000 square yards of land set aside to build a functional village for freed laborers.

The first row of 10 freshly painted pink houses glows softly in the fading summer evening, a pile of new porcelain squat toilets awaits installation and four partially constructed brick walls broadcast plans for a community clinic. A sign on the door of one home proclaims, "A child employed is a future destroyed."

Courage Village is the vision of two men, peace activist Aslam Khwaja and businessman Kalem Sheikh. While Khwaja provided the inspiration, Sheikh has used his family's wealth from a successful cloth trading empire to aid some of Pakistan's forgotten *harris*.

Pakistan's NGO sector offers little on-the-ground relief. Most large NGOs, like the HRCP see their role as advocating law enforcement.

Others, such as the Bonded Labor Liberation Front, regularly free laborers through legal means, but their lack of funds means that they can offer very little support for freed laborers, many of whom are forced to return to the very system they tried to escape.

"The root of the problem is religious discrimination and government inaction," says Sheikh, who is Muslim, but whose family comes from Hindu roots. "We (Muslims and the wealthy) have a duty to show these people that we care about what is happening to them."

While the international NGO ActionAid bought the land for Courage Village, the funds for the homes themselves have come straight from the pockets of Sheikh and others in Pakistan's wealthy elite.

Ground was broken at Courage Village seven months ago and Sheikh found willing freed *harris* in nearby encampments to build the houses they would later inhabit. He hopes to see it grow into a town of 207 homes, though he is still raising funds to continue construction. Sheikh believes that his program will be successful where others have failed because he and a few other friends are personally committed to the project.

"Nobody trusts the government or NGOs in Pakistan," says Sheikh. "They make promises, come visit and do nothing. The money they raise is never seen by these people. Occasionally they free some laborers and then send them to the streets."

Sheikh believes that only a raised consciousness among the wealthy in Pakistani society can yield results. He is currently trying to find relatively well-paid employment for the inhabitants of Courage Village in fellow industrialists' factories.

"These people must get away from the fields and the system that has enslaved them. They have a slave mentality now and won't be free until they have independent work in another sector."

Sheikh, who recently accompanied Courage Villagers on a peace march across the border to India to lobby for laborers' rights and religious tolerance, also encourages activism among the free laborers that he aids.

The American people must put pressure on the landlords through President [Perez]



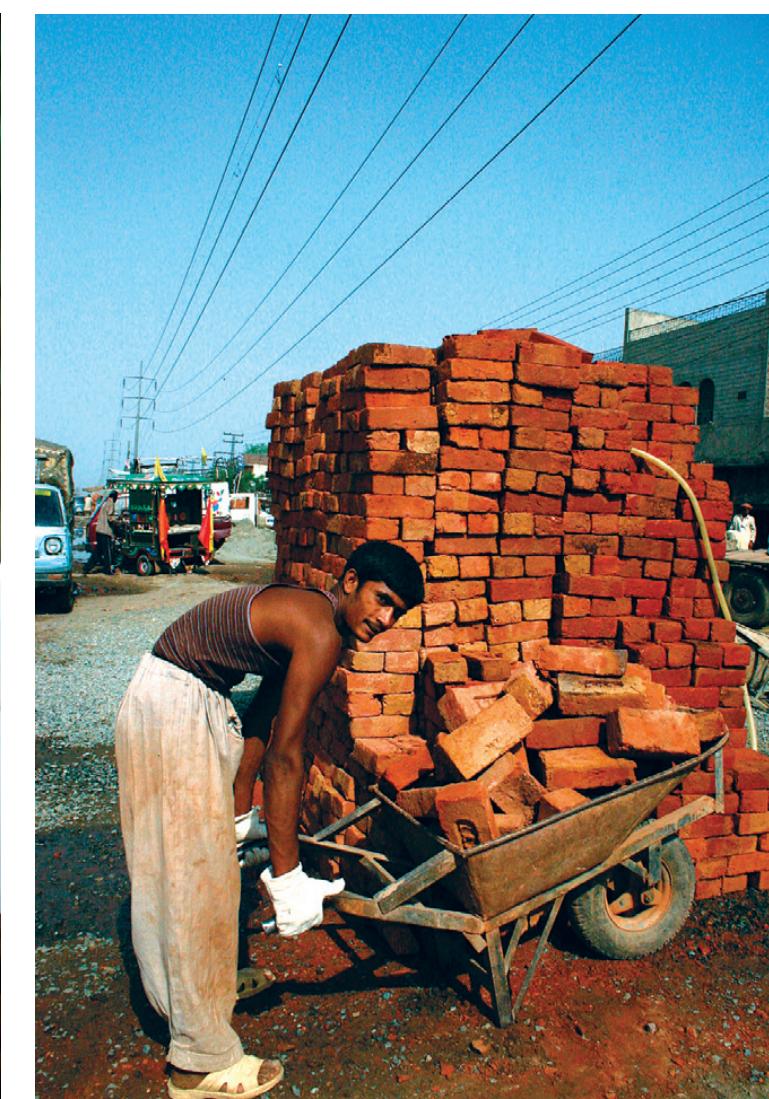
AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE A group of bonded laborers who recently gained their freedom hold an impromptu meeting. They are now homeless and unsure of how to support their families.

the loss of a beloved son has left the Masih family wary and exhausted.

Masih's father, Naid, holds a worn folder overflowing with documentation of abuses and important business cards in his toughened hands as proof of how hard they've tried. He lists his union's demands: registration of workers and brick kilns, officially notified payments, hourly based work. But then he reaches for a black-and-white photo of Shoukat, posed young and serious in an argyle vest. Naid's lined face pulls tight against high cheekbones and collarbones into grief.

Shoukat's fatherless children sit with their heads lowered. Naid's hands rise to cover his tear-streaked face, and the business cards slip to his lap. "The problem lingers on, it will never be solved. They take the money and run away. They come and nothing ever changes."

For more information, please visit
www.CommonLanguageProject.net



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—SARAH STUDEVILLE
Hunter College Class of 2005
Co-founder, Common Language Project

(Photo of Sarah taken in Pakistan)



Undeterred, the War-for-Oil Machine Rolls Toward Iran

BY A.K. GUPTA

As preparations for war against Iraq intensified in the fall of 2002, neo-conservatives in Washington were fond of remarking that "The road to Tehran runs through Baghdad." The toppling of Saddam Hussein was to be the first step in remaking the map of the Middle East through military force. Syria and Iran were on the hit list, and even Saudi Arabia was suggested as a candidate for regime change.

Three years after invading Iraq the U.S. military is bogged down but that hasn't cooled the ardor for attacking Iran. Since late last year, the Bush administration has stepped up pressure on Iran.

In many ways, the campaign seems a replay of the Iraq War: attack a reactionary Middle East regime with vast oil reserves over the issue of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, pressure or bribe other countries and international institutions to join in, talk diplomacy but place intolerable conditions that doom any negotiations, and all the while prepare for war.

The maneuvering against Iran is part of a larger neo-conservative project to ensure U.S. global supremacy for the 21st century. The plans have been kicking around since 1992 when then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney oversaw Undersecretary for Policy Paul Wolfowitz in drafting a Pentagon planning document that stated, "In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil."

PLAYING THE GREAT GAME

That's where Iraq and Iran come in. Tom O'Donnell, a physicist at the University of Michigan who studies the "globalized oil order," says the reason a conflict with Iran is coming to a head now is because "there is a shortage of capacity in the oil sector and that can only be made up by the Gulf States in the Middle East, and Iraq and Iran are way below potential." O'Donnell says that the International Energy Agency estimates that by 2020 the world will need a three-quarter increase in pumping capacity over 2001 to meet growing demand, and big oil projects "take seven to ten years to come online." Hence, the urgency felt by the U.S. government to deal with Iran now.

As evidenced by record-high oil and gasoline prices, the world is facing limits on crude oil production. After Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran have the largest reserves of liquid crude in the world. Both, however, have seen their oil industry hobbled by U.S. policy, causing the global supply shortage.

For Iraq, sanctions kept oil exports under 2 million barrels a day after the oil-for-food program was established in 1997 (and virtually nothing for the six years prior to that). Iraq was also thwarted from making basic repairs to its oil industry. From 1998 to 2001, Iraq applied to purchase some \$2.5 billion in spare parts for the oil industry allowed to it under the sanctions, but received only \$953 million in goods.

As for Iran, on March 15, 1995, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12957, banning U.S. companies from investing in Iran's oil and natural gas industries. This was followed up two months later by another executive order forbidding all U.S. trade and investment with Iran. Then in December 1995, Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, which threatened penalties against any foreign



LEO GARCIA

company investing more than \$20 million in Iran's energy sector in a single year.

The Bush administration won't allow Iran's oil production to grow under the clerics, argues O'Donnell, because that would allow them to use oil as a weapon. Iran pumps 3.8 million barrels of oil a day, but it exports only 2.7 million. In an interview with Reuters on April 19, International Energy Agency Executive Director Claude Mandil underscored why Iran is currently unable to use oil as a weapon. Mandil said, "if we have to offset Iranian exports... we have kept over 4 billion barrels (of stocks), which can last several years."

administration is demanding that Iran suspend all enrichment activity. In return, it's offering Iran spare parts for aging airliners (from Boeing), support for entry into the World Trade Organization and light-water reactors. Iran has turned down the offer of light-water reactors, however, noting that it would be required to import enriched uranium to fuel them, leaving the country vulnerable to political pressure placed on suppliers.

By giving up its one trump card — uranium enrichment — Iran would be left with almost no bargaining power, no security guarantee and no lifting of sanctions. The

>> By demanding that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment as a precursor to negotiations, the Bush administration is placing an impossible demand on Iran. It's trying to inflame the conflict over nuclear weapons because it would look bad to do it over oil.

Eager to modernize its oil industry, Iran has offered to give up uranium enrichment almost completely as part of a "grand bargain" with the United States. In return, Iran wants a security guarantee that it will not be attacked and sanctions lifted on its energy sector. After the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, *The Washington Post* reported on June 18, Iran offered a comprehensive agenda for negotiations and "suggested everything was on the table — including full cooperation on nuclear programs, acceptance of Israel and the termination of Iranian support for Palestinian militant groups." Flush with victory, however, the Bush administration spurned the proposal.

As a precursor to negotiations, the Bush

hostage crisis to sweep away domestic opposition. "Now," says Farbod, "some would probably welcome a limited U.S. attack. It would allow them to get rid of all their opponents. Even short of a military confrontation, the present political confrontation also helps the hardliners in repressing dissent."

"These guys are not Saddam Hussein," says Farbod, "they have a social base, albeit probably a shrinking one." He describes the hardliners' base as the domestic petite bourgeoisie, while their political discourse is aimed at the poorer classes. Ahmadinejad's government promises them "cheaper bank loans and tapping into oil reserve" funds to prop up the system of food and fuel subsidies.

If Ahmadinejad "can't remove the U.S. sanctions on Iran he can't deliver on these promises," says Farbod. "This is one of their goals [in trying] to remove U.S. sanctions with the bargaining chip of uranium."

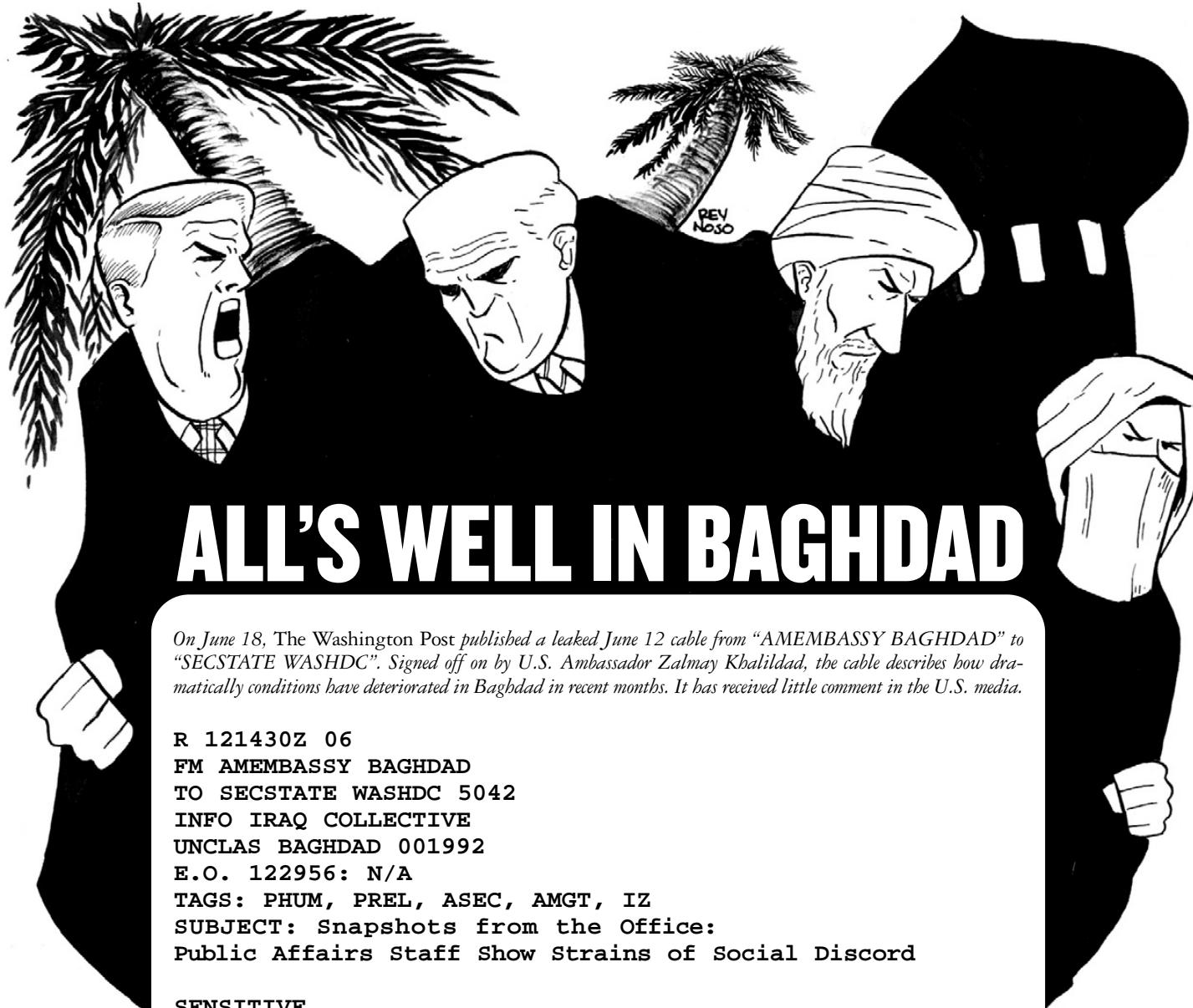
IRAN'S ECONOMIC CRISIS

Iran is in an economic crisis that will only worsen, says Farbod. "The official unemployment rate is 15 percent. To keep pace with this rate, the government needs to create about 700,000 jobs a year. Most economists point to the fact that the government can produce only half of this... The economic situation is worse than in the late nineties. Many people have two jobs, three jobs."

"There are three facets to the economic crisis," explains Farbod. "The first is the 'petroleum curse,' which makes for laziness on the side of the economic sector of countries that rely on petroleum." About half of Iran's governmental budget comes from oil and gas exports. The second is "the massive control that secretive foundations have over the economic lifeline of the republic, which are unaccountable. These are pseudo-religious foundations, since religion is political in Iran. They control almost all the domestic economic activities — service, agriculture, manufacturing. They have their tentacles everywhere... We have no idea how the funds are used." The third aspect is the U.S. sanctions, which "have limited the amount of direct foreign investment." The sanctions also dampen "domestic investment by increasing the general insecurity of economic activity."

Looking forward, it would be a mistake to think that the United States won't attack Iran because it's bogged down in Iraq, argues O'Donnell. Writing in the June issue of *Z Magazine*, he suggests that the U.S. would first try to cripple Iran's air force, making Iran "susceptible to ground incursions by various forces hostile to the regime. These might include Kurdish, Azerbaijani and other nationalist separatist forces, which have long fought against Iran's central government."

Iran is clearly in a fix. The mullahs are loath to capitulate to U.S. demands as this would imperil their rule at home. At the same time, the United States has succeeded in uniting all the major capitalist powers behind it. Even Russia and China have demanded that Iran suspend uranium enrichment. Having had numerous chances to resolve the conflict peacefully, the Bush administration seems eager for war. An attack against Iran may come this fall in an attempt to influence congressional elections. But even if it doesn't, the Bush administration still has two-and-a-half years left to stir up trouble.



On June 18, The Washington Post published a leaked June 12 cable from "AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD" to "SECSTATE WASHDC". Signed off on by U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the cable describes how dramatically conditions have deteriorated in Baghdad in recent months. It has received little comment in the U.S. media.

R 121430Z 06
 FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5042
 INFO IRAQ COLLECTIVE
 UNCLAS BAGHDAD 001992
 E.O. 122956: N/A
 TAGS: PHUM, PREL, ASEC, AMGT, IZ
 SUBJECT: Snapshots from the Office:
 Public Affairs Staff Show Strains of Social Discord

SENSITIVE

*Beginning in March, and picking up in mid-May, Iraqi staff in the Public Affairs section have complained that Islamist and/or militia groups have been negatively affecting their daily routine. Harassment over proper dress and habits has been increasingly pervasive. They also report that power cuts and fuel prices have diminished their quality of life. Conditions vary by neighborhood, but even upscale neighborhoods such as Mansur have visibly deteriorated.

*A Shiite who favors Western clothing... [says] some groups are pushing women to cover even their faces, a step not taken in Iran even at its most conservative.

*A Sunni said that people in her middle-class neighborhood are harassing women and telling them to cover up and stop using cell phones (suspected channel to licentious relationships with men). She said that the taxi driver who brings her every day to the green zone checkpoint has told her he cannot let her ride unless she wears a headcover. A female in the PAS cultural section is now wearing a full abaya after receiving direct threats in May.

*An Arab newspaper editor told us he is preparing an extensive survey of ethnic cleansing, which he said is taking place in almost every Iraqi province, as political parties and their militias are seemingly engaged in tit-for-tat reprisals all over Iraq.

*Temperatures in Baghdad have already reached 115 degrees. Employees all confirm that by the last week of May, they were getting one hour of power for every six hours without. That was only about four hours of power a day for the city. By early June, the situation had improved slightly. In Hai al Shaab, power has recently improved from one in six to one in

three hours. Other staff report similar variances. Central Baghdad neighborhood Bab al Mu'atham has had no city power for over a month.] One staff member reported that a friend lives in a building that houses a new minister; within 24 hours of his appointment, her building had city power 24 hours a day.

*Fuel lines have also taxed our staff. One employee told us May 29 that he had spent 12 hours on his day off (Saturday) waiting to get gas.

*One employee informed us in March that his brother in law had been kidnapped. The man was eventually released, but this caused enormous emotional distress to the entire family. One employee, a Sunni Kurd, received an indirect threat to her life in April. She took extended leave, and by May, relocated abroad with her family.

*In April, employees began reporting a change in demeanor of guards at the green zone checkpoints. They seemed to be more militia-like, in some cases seemingly taunting. One employee asked us to explore getting her press credentials because guards had held her embassy badge up and proclaimed loudly to nearby passers-by "Embassy" as she entered. Such information is a death sentence if overheard by the wrong people.]

*We cannot call employees in on weekends or holidays without blowing their "cover." Likewise, they have been unavailable during multiple security closures imposed by the government since February.

*Some of our staff do not take home their American cell phones, as this makes them a target. Planning for their own possible abduction, they use code names for friends and col-

leagues and contacts entered into Iraq cell phones. For at least six months, we have not been able to use any local staff members for translation at on-camera press events.

*We have begun shredding documents printed out that show local staff surnames. In March, a few staff members approached us to ask what provisions would we make for them if we evacuate.

*Many Baghdad neighborhoods have self-selected local governments centered around militias that control the people in each neighborhood. People do not trust their neighbors. They do not know the identity of many of the people who are enforcing codes of conduct and dress.

*Against this backdrop of frayed social networks, tension and moodiness have risen. One colleague told us he feels "defeated" by circumstances, citing the example of being unable to help his two-year-old son who has asthma and cannot sleep in the stifling heat.

*Another employee tells us that life outside the Green Zone has become "emotionally draining." He lives in a mostly Shiite area and claims to attend a funeral "every evening."

*Personal safety depends on good relations with the "neighborhood" governments, who barricade streets and ward off outsiders. The central government, our staff says, is not relevant; even local mukhtars have been displaced or co-opted by militias. People no longer trust most neighbors.

(signed) KHALILZAD

The full document can be found at <http://www.parapundit.com/archives/003524.html>

World briefs



GREENLAND MELTING

The Greenland ice sheet is melting faster than anyone had predicted, at 52 cubic miles per year. The ice sheet, which is the area of Mexico and up to two miles thick, influences global weather on a scale matched only by Antarctica. In the heart of the sheet, snow from a quarter million years ago is still preserved. Since 1991 the average annual winter temperature inland has risen 10 degrees. The increasing warming is causing Greenland's ice sheets to flow faster. Fresh water pouring into the Atlantic has tripled in the last decade, researchers at NASA's jet propulsion laboratory reported in February. The changes have scientists speculating whether this signifies the beginning of a sudden climate change after thousands of years of relative stability.

AFGHANISTAN ON FIRE

The Telegraph (UK) reported on June 27 that in the previous six weeks more than 600 Afghans have been killed in southern Afghanistan, "about the same rate of deaths as in 1992-93 during the civil war that ushered in a Taliban takeover." The increased death toll is the result of an aggressive U.S. military campaign in the region before NATO forces take over in July. Seventeen GIs died in the country in June, one of the highest monthly totals in nearly five years of war. The Pentagon claims that all the Afghan dead are "extremists," but media reports indicate that at least three villages were bombed. In one incident reported by AFP, 40 people were killed on May 21 when U.S. Apache helicopters and A-10 fighter jets bombed the hamlet of Hajiyani in Kandahar province. Meanwhile, President Hamid Karzai is reported to be relying increasingly on warlords and their militias to maintain control and is openly criticizing Western nations for failing to provide sufficient aid or security.

RAILWAY BLOCKADE IN MANITOBA

The Roseau River First Nation and at least six other First Nations in Manitoba, Canada are planning a 24-hour blockade from June 29-30 of two rail lines crossing their lands into the United States, according to the website First Perspective. Chief Terrance Nelson noted the action would "send a message, that resource wealth of our lands are what supports every Canadian." Nelson said that while the Canadian government has a \$4.5 trillion surplus and derives most of its revenue from resource royalties, more than 6,000 First Nations land claims remain in limbo.

HOUSING CRUNCH IN VENEZUELA

With an estimated housing deficit of at least 560,000 units, Venezuela is struggling to fulfill the goals of President Hugo Chavez's "social revolution," Inter Press Service reported June 8. One human rights group criticizes the government for prioritizing "new dwellings, which translates into inaction, due to the resources required and red tape involved. The group, Program of Action and Education in Human Rights, did note that only nine percent of Venezuela's housing units could be classified as slums. The government's housing ministry says that it hopes to build 100,000 new dwellings in 2006, "including 60,000 to be built by companies from China and Iran."

Pleasure in Pride

FUN HOME BY ALISON BECHDEL
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 2006

SUBGURLZ BY JENNIFER CAMPBELL
SOFT SKULL, 2003

STUCK RUBBER BABY
BY HOWARD CRUSE;
DC COMICS, 2000

Alison Bechdel, known for her strip "Dykes To Watch Out For," has just released her graphic novel, *Fun Home*. In supple language and a new graphic style, her justly acclaimed memoir tells the story of a daughter and her father with titrations of yearning and humor as precise as her ink-wash. While part-time funeral director Bechdel pursued his avocations — literature and the lapidary restoration of their small-town 1800s Gothic Revival home — young Alison learned to hate the high-maintenance intricacy of the furniture and considers her father suspiciously lacking in manly virtues by way of the gunslingers and he-men on TV.

Prepubescent "Al" refused to wear frills, surreptitiously disposed of hair barrettes, played sports with her older male cousins, and grew up to come out as a lesbian where her father had lived his life in a stifling small-town closet. However, this is far from the kind of simplistic triumphal tale that dumps its Anchises unceremoniously.

The attention this queer graphic novel has been receiving doesn't always find the best and most beautiful in this genre; another work of recent history, human failings, passion and feist, Howard Cruse's *Stuck Rubber Baby* deserves praise and a closer look. As the first out comics creator with the '70s underground *Barefootz*, then the founding editor of *Gay Comix*, he should have a reputation beyond the queer comics cognoscenti.

Like Howard, Jennifer Camper has taken her art and vision where *Bad Girls and Dangerous Women* go — everywhere. You can still find *Bad/Dangerous*, the laugh-out-loud

I WAS SPARTAN TO MY FATHER'S ATHENIAN



ALISON BECHTEL

anthology of Camper's greatest hits, but now the Lebanese-American artist is editing and contributing to her groundbreaking *Juicy Mother* anthology and doing spoken word (with projected comics!) about anti-Arab racism, male street harassment, and other matters. *Juicy* features some of the new cartoonists of color, on their own terms, and in Camper's graphic novella, *Subgurlz*, the lusty underground protagonists were equally diverse. All of these comics are great Pride presents for your friends-fam of every orientation, and if you haven't read them yourself yet — pleasure awaits.

—ANGELA BOCAGE

Gitmo Rage

THE ROAD TO GUANTÁNAMO
DIRECTED BY
MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM
AND MAT WHITECROSS (2006)

The über-prolific British director Michael Winterbottom has made 12 movies in the last ten years, a remarkable feat if you consider filmmaking akin to a typing test. In his best films (*24 Hour Party People* and *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*), this speed can create a buzzing energy around the whole production that overwhelms any flat jokes, bad judgment, or poorly conceived character. But more often the mistakes add up, revealing a film that could have benefited from a longer gestation period.

Winterbottom's new docudrama *The Road to Guantánamo* (co-directed with his editor, Mat Whitecross) suffers from the urgent need to have its story told right now, and as such, it's precisely half the devastatingly important movie it could have been.

The film tells the story of the Tipton Three, twenty-something British Muslims who, after traveling in October of 2001 to Pakistan and then Afghanistan, are captured as supposed Taliban members and then detained, tortured and endlessly "interrogated" by U.S. troops at Guantánamo for more than two years. Mixing neorealist reenactments, news footage, and recent interviews with the three men, the film blurs fiction and nonfiction à la Winterbottom's other recent work. Yet, the interplay of the real and non-real does not illuminate the story (as it did in *Tristram Shandy*) or even complicate our sense of truth — it just seems pointlessly redundant. This is especially true of the present-day interviews with Asif, Shafiq and Ruhel, who seem as nice and normal as their naturalistic fictional counterparts but don't add anything new to their story.

It's a missed opportunity because these interviews could have filled in many of the story gaps and unclear motivations in the film's rushed and

Journey to the Ends of Anarchy

When traveling activist Ramor Ryan started working on his new book, he envisioned writing a political tract comparing the demise of traditional top-down leftist politics with the subsequent rise around the world of a new generation of decentralized, grassroots social movements that seek to transform power more than to seize it. Fortunately, Ryan ended up doing something entirely different: telling stories.

From the squats of Berlin to life as a deckhand on a Central American banana boat to the perilous mountains of rebel Kurdistan to an exhausted, mud-soaked slice of Zapatista utopia, *Clandestines: The Pirate Journals of an Irish Exile* is a rollicking travelogue. Ryan knows the traveler's secret of being open to the moment and trusting whatever it brings. His poignant tales of defeat, desolation, betrayal and lingering hope are told with both humor and a canny insight into the human spirit.

Many of these tales end with bizarre twists — like the dictatorial banana boat captain who unexpectedly offers some absurd advice on the secret of happiness — that linger on in one's mind. His then (1989-90) and now (2005) memories of Central America also give his larger narrative a painful twist as he returns to find societies that had once seemed on the verge of revolutionary transformation wrecked by war, neo-liberalism and the drug trade.

"This is a catastrophic region," he writes. "Darkly violent places survive tenuously on remittances sent back from migrant family members working illegally in the U.S. and other countries. Nicaragua, the flagship of the failed revolutionary project, is like an orphaned child fallen in with a bad gang of glue-sniffing street kids."

However, the least overtly political chapter in the book is perhaps the best written as he tells the story of a dismal Guatemalan port town and a group of lovesick housewives who cling to fading hopes that someday their immigrant husbands will bring them to the United States.

Beneath the artful storytelling, the author probes the Big

Question that bedevils radicals of all stripes at this juncture in history: how do you transform a fundamentally flawed system that seems impervious to change? His witness to the cooptation and/or defeat

of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Sandinistas, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and the Brazilian Workers Party is sobering and leaves one longing for a new approach.

While Ryan wears his anarchist politics on his sleeve, the book never descends into a screed. If anything, he is overly vague about his politics. What is anarchism — a defiant posture toward an unjust world? An attempt to work freely and cooperatively with others? An archipelago of politicized sub-cultures scattered on the margins of the global shopping mall? How can such an amorphous movement pose a serious challenge to business as usual? None of this is made clear. If you've spent time in "free, rebel spaces," you will know.

The most inspiring example Ryan can point to is the Zapatistas autonomous municipalities in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Unfortunately, this chapter, *Diez de Abril*, is only 12 pages long and it doesn't explore whether the mutual aid that has flowered in Zapatista communities is due at least in part to their circumstances — isolated, impoverished, land-based communities in which neighbors must work together to survive — and not so easily replicated in modern, consumer societies where activists as much as anyone else tend to lead highly atomized existences.

Despite *Clandestines*' limitations, the book is a delightful read. Hopefully, Ryan hasn't used up his stock of entertaining stories.

—JOHN TARLETON

incoherent first half. As if in a hurry to get to the torture sequences, the film quickly portrays the men's decision to enter Afghanistan as a bit of foolish curiosity, tempered only by a vague desire "to help" that they never pursue. With no medical or military training, the men are virtually useless in Afghanistan anyway, making the choice seem more exceptionally naïve than courageous.

Still, there's no denying the monumental impact of the film's second half, especially in light of the recent suicides at Guantánamo. Kept in outdoor cages, locked in solitary

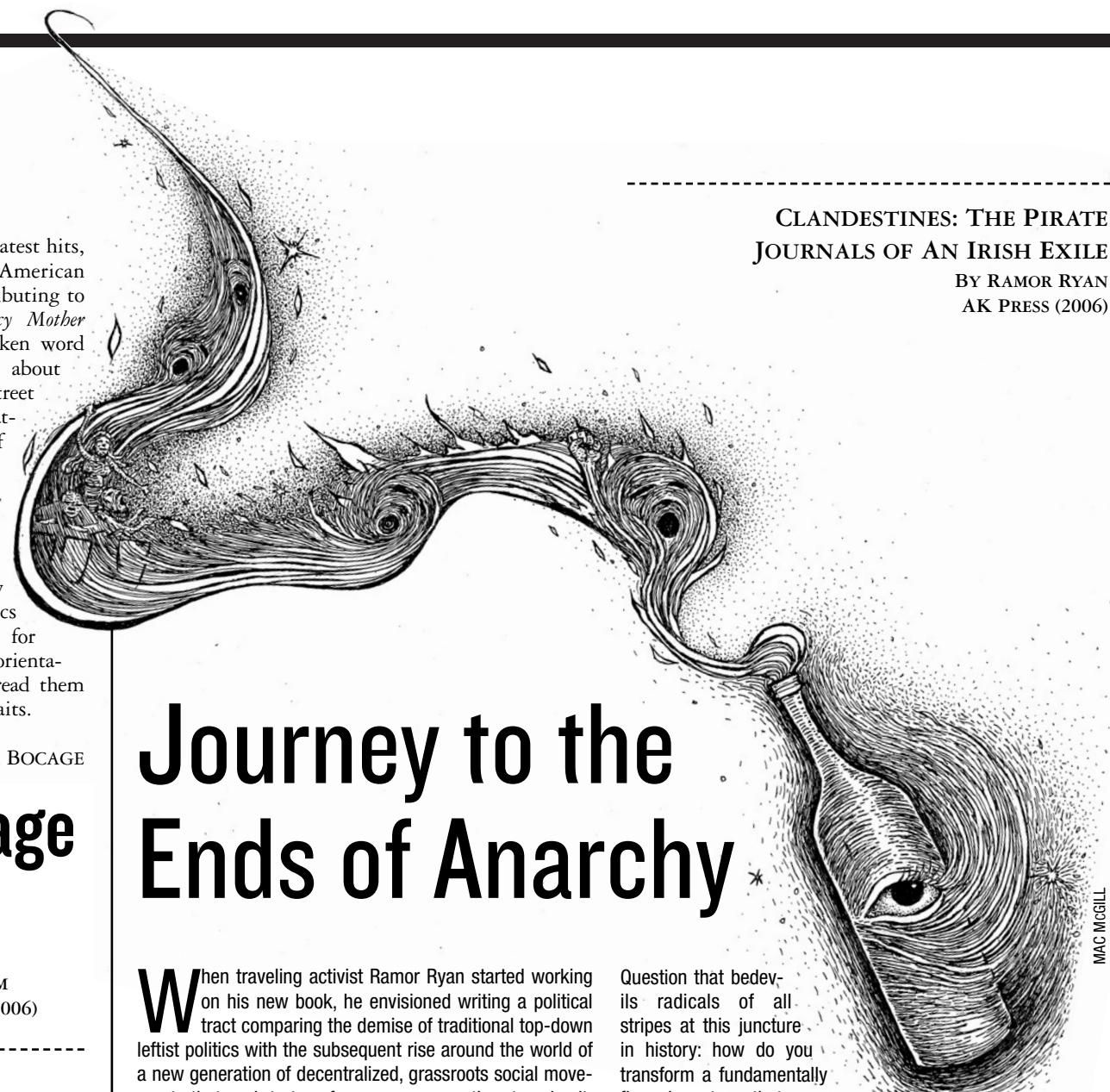
confinement for months on end, repeatedly beaten and chained to floors, they experience treatment that is another appalling example of our war on terrorism. The film shows how interrogation is just another word for coercion, that Guantánamo is designed to break spirits in order to force guilty admissions from the completely innocent. It's a sickening, mind-numbing abuse of power, conveyed with an eyes-wide-open horror through the directors' subtle, effective filmmaking. Much of the credit here belongs to the cast of

non-professional actors, who flawlessly detail the men's incredible strength and fortitude in the face of unspeakable conditions. As expected, the film ends with text outlining the continued abuse of Guantánamo's "illegal combatants" and the shaking anger it inspires is almost enough to make one forget the film's many faults.

The *Road to Guantánamo* is currently playing in New York at the Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

—CHARLIE BASS

CLANDESTINES: THE PIRATE JOURNALS OF AN IRISH EXILE
BY RAMOR RYAN
AK PRESS (2006)



THE CULT OF THE SUICIDE BOMBER

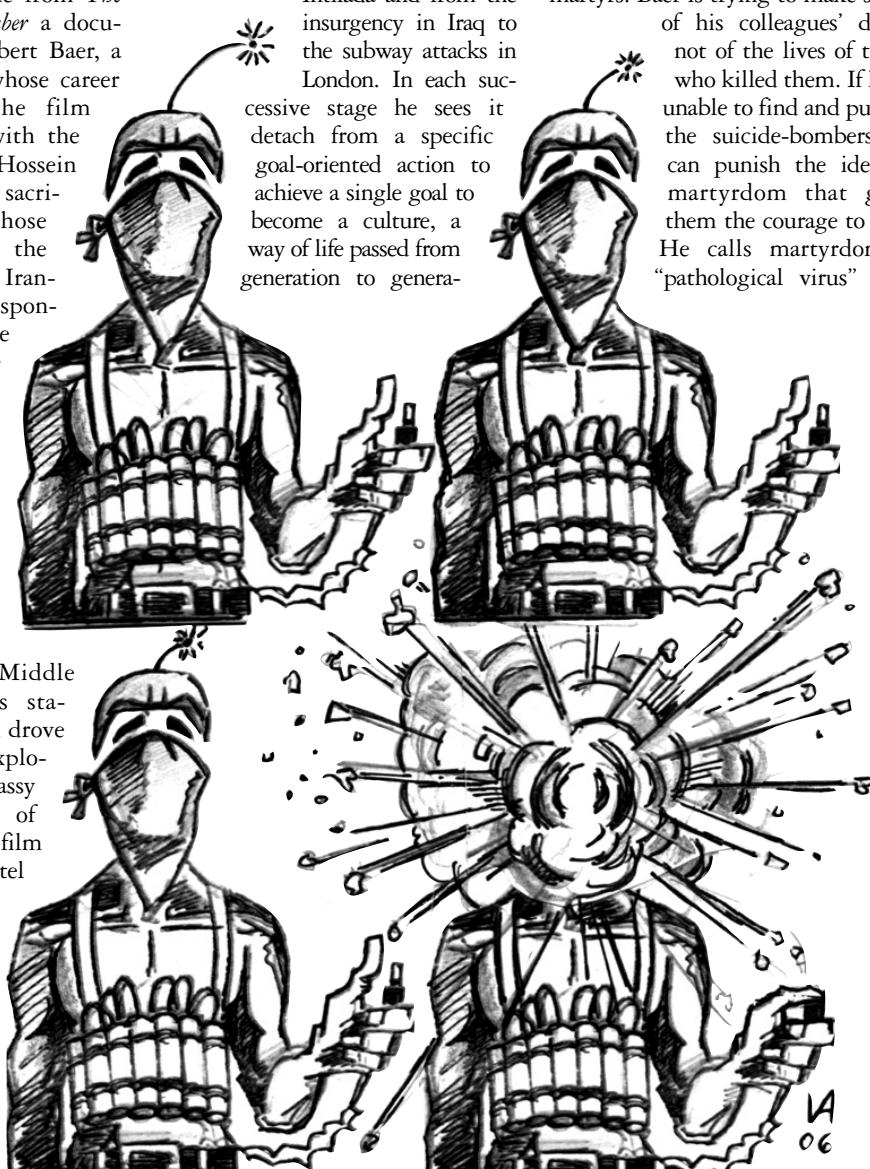
WRITTEN BY ROBERT BEAR AND KEVIN TOOLIS
DIRECTED BY DAVID BATTY AND KEVIN TOOLIS
DISTRIBUTED BY DISINFORMATION

The Boy Bombers

In 1980, as men killed men to move the border of Iran and Iraq, a family sat down to dinner. News came of a boy who strapped explosives to himself and blew up an enemy tank. "I said they are talking of my son," his mother remembered. "No one said anything after that."

The silence at the table was of sorrow being overpowered by fear and pride. It is a scene from *The Cult of the Suicide Bomber* a documentary hosted by Robert Baer, a former C.I.A. officer whose career was the basis for the film *Syriana*. Baer begins with the story of Mohammad Hossein Fahmideh, the boy who sacrificed himself and whose death is celebrated as the first martyrdom of the Iran-Iraq War. Fahmideh's spontaneous act of courage was elevated by the Ayatollah Khomeini into an official tactic of war, culminating in thousands of boys marching across mine-fields to explode them and clear a path for the military.

The tactic saved Iran and soon martyrdom spread through the Middle East where Baer was stationed. In 1983, a rebel drove a pick-up filled with explosives into the U.S. embassy in Beirut killing 63 of Baer's colleagues. In the film he stares at the shiny hotel built over the site that has no memorial to acknowledge their deaths. So, he returns to Iran to ask Fahmideh's mother about her son's suicide



NICHOLAS ALLNACH

and is told the boy did not commit suicide but sacrificed himself for the nation. The conversation is a subtle tug-of-war. Are Fahmideh and all those who followed him suicide bombers or martyrs?

It is an unresolved question that Baer explores from martyrdom in the Iran-Iraq War to Hezbollah's 1983 bombings in Beirut to the Palestinian Intifada and from the insurgency in Iraq to the subway attacks in London. In each successive stage he sees it detach from a specific goal-oriented action to achieve a single goal to become a culture, a way of life passed from generation to genera-

tion. He shows us a father with friends celebrating a video of his son exploding an Israeli checkpoint, boys in black-masks holding machine guns and babies dressed in ceremonial outfits with dynamite wrapped around the waist.

Baer never opens himself to their desperation. He insists on calling them suicide-bombers rather than martyrs. Baer is trying to make sense of his colleagues' death not of the lives of those who killed them. If he is unable to find and punish the suicide-bombers he can punish the idea of martyrdom that gave them the courage to kill. He calls martyrdom a "pathological virus" that

leads "to chaos."

For all his acclaimed intimacy with Mid-East culture Baer joins far-away pundits like David Brooks who wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, "Suicide bombing is the crack-cocaine of warfare." Brooks' statement is a racially loaded phrase – for other addictive drugs such as heroin or meth exist, but crack-cocaine in our culture is linked to Blacks. He uses crack-cocaine to describe military tactics used by another people of color, in this case, Arabs, to suggest a common deficiency of reason that is the staple of racism.

It is an angle of speech intended to be a slippery slope down which millions of Arabs fall to the rhetorical position of junkies. It lengthens the distance between us and them. It justifies morbid voyeurism as a medical necessity. It returns us to a place of power as the ones who can cure them of the "pathological virus" and thereby cure them of the only weapon they have to fend us off. If they are addicted to death what of our addiction to oil and are the two related? To give up the insulating rhetoric that degrades Muslims to victims of feverish rage and see them as a people driven to desperation, we would be forced to see ourselves through their eyes and accept the bankruptcy of our transcendent values when we sabotaged democracy for cheap oil.

In the end, the Western agent-turned-documentarian and the Muslim family both are locked in mutual suspicion, each trying to hold on to dead loved ones by anchoring them into a history that is less a history than a mythology of good and evil that continues the war.

—NICHOLAS POWERS

FAILED STATES: THE ABUSE OF POWER AND THE ASSAULT ON DEMOCRACY

BY NOAM CHOMSKY
METROPOLITAN BOOKS, 2006

Dissent to Barbarism

In *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, Noam Chomsky sketches the historical origins of the Bush administration's "preemptive war" doctrine, beginning with Andrew Jackson's conquest of Spanish-held Florida in the first Seminole war of 1818 (John Quincy Adams justified the war as self-defense), the annexation of Texas in 1845, the blocking of Cuba's liberation in 1898 and turning it into a "virtual colony" until 1959.

Chomsky is alarmed by aspects of U.S. nuclear policy, including its own violations of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1970 and its discriminatory demands for

Iranian non-proliferation, while granting exemptions to Israel, India and Pakistan.

Most disturbing are Chomsky's references to a recent review in *Foreign Affairs* by a distinguished scholar of German history, Fritz Stern, of the descent in Germany from decency to barbarism.

"With implications for the here and now that no reader can fail to discern," Chomsky writes, "Stern reviews Hitler's demonic appeal to his 'divine mission' as Germany's savior in a 'pseudo-religious transfiguration of politics' adapted to 'traditional Christian forms.'"

Chomsky proceeds to analyze the results of the 2004 U.S. elections –

"in fact, they barely took place in any serious sense of the term election" – and their outcome, which he characterizes as harmful to the general American population and threatening for the world and future generations.

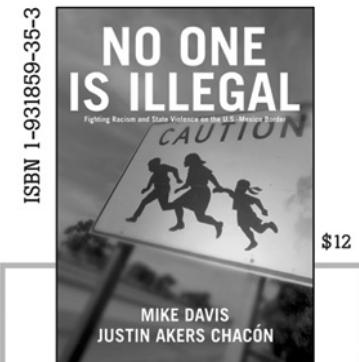
In his presentation of possible solutions to immediate dilemmas and crises, Chomsky is less hopeful than usual. For example, in a previous book, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, he emphasized what the individual could do, from demonstrating to doing one's own research to political organizing.

In *Failed States*, he shifts his proposals for action to the international arena. He urges that the United

States accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and the World Court; sign and carry forward the Kyoto protocols; let the United Nations take the lead in international crises; keep to the traditional interpretation of the U.N. charter; give up the Security Council veto; cut back sharply on military spending and sharply increase social spending.

The reader who wishes to know the score will find it in Chomsky's new book. The world's multiple crises have been allowed to become unmanageable. If and when they converge, the results will be calamitous and conclusive.

—DONALD PANETH



No One Is Illegal debunks the leading ideas behind the often-violent right-wing backlash against immigrants by putting a human face on the immigrants who risk their lives crossing the border to work in the United States.

MIKE DAVIS AND JUSTIN AKERS CHACÓN
NO ONE IS ILLEGAL

FIGHTING RACISM AND STATE VIOLENCE ON THE BORDER

"In an environment where the Right sets the agenda and where liberal opposition sidelines itself in the debate, any discussion of immigration is corrupted by a litany of lies and deceptions. While vigilantes go unchallenged in the streets, so too do the misconceptions that they exploit to take advantage of peoples' fears and uncertainties. While opposition has been absent from liberal organizations, grassroots efforts ... will determine in which direction immigration politics will go in the next years."

From *No One is Illegal*

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Thur July 6 @ 7pm • \$5 Sugg.
DISCUSSION: "SUPPORT FOR DANIEL MCGOWAN"

NYC environmental activist Daniel McGowan is facing a minimum of life in prison if convicted. Come to this info-session and learn how you can plug into the fight against the government's "Green Scare."

For more information, check out www.supportdaniel.org.

Sat July 8th @ 7pm • Free
READING: JD GLASS, PUNK LIKE ME

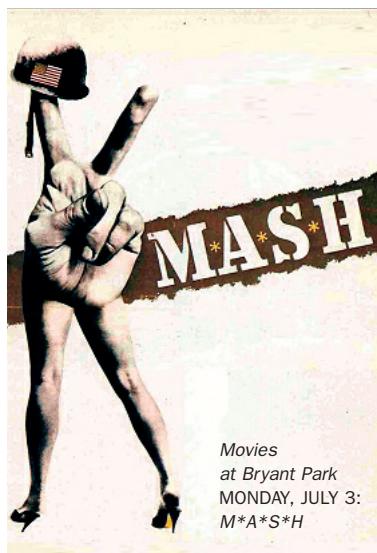
Wed July 12 @ 7pm • Free
READING: SHARING THE STORIES OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Journalist Jimmie Briggs spent six years getting to know child soldiers and their families from five different countries, and will share his experiences with a photo presentation and discussion of his book *Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers Go to War*.

Fri July 14 @ 7pm • \$5 - \$10 Sugg.
SPARKLE KIDS ACTION NETWORK THE CHORUS OF CRAYONS TOUR 2006
Come on out for a gender-defying coloring book-making workshop.

Sat July 15 @ 7pm • \$5 Sugg.
SCREENING: BLACK DIAMONDS
Black Diamonds: Mountaintop Removal and the Fight for Coalfield Justice is the first film of its kind, offering a comprehensive survey of surface mining, mountaintop removal practices and radical community resistance to mining destruction in West Virginia.

SUPER SUMMER calendar JUNE-JULY



Movies
at Bryant Park
MONDAY, JULY 3:
M*A*S*H

THE INDYPENDENT has
open weekly meetings
TUESDAYS AT 7PM
4 West 43rd Street
Room 311

TUES JULY 4
3:30pm • FREE
tix required
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212-835-2789 or see
www.RiverToRiverNYC.com for more information. Battery Park, NY

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Around 8:30- 9pm • FREE
You are never too cool for fire works, if you
need an added incentive, get as close as
possible. Safety First.
Lower East River

THURS JULY 6
11am - 1pm • \$12 • No Reservations nec.
WALKING TOUR: FIVE POINTS AND THE
GANGS OF NEW YORK
Join Joyce Gold as she leads you on a walking
tour through one of the most infamous
immigrant neighborhoods of America – the
19th century Five Points.
Meet at Bayard St. (1 blk. south of
Canal St.) and the Bowery
212-748-8568

FRI JULY 7
7pm • FREE
READING: SHARING THE STORIES OF CHILD
SOLDIERS
Journalist Jimmie Briggs spent six years getting
to know child soldiers and their families
from five different countries, and will share
his experiences with a photo presentation
and discussion of his book *Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers Go to War*.
Bluestockings, 172 Allen St.

7pm • FREE
FILM: A WALK THROUGH THE FOOTPRINT
Dir. George Lerner's 18-minute short profiling
several Prospect Hts. residents who face
eviction due to developer Bruce Ratner's
proposed Bklyn. Arena & high-rise project,
which would displace some 800
people from their homes.
At The Park Slope Food Coop, 782 Union St.,
Park Slope.

SAT JULY 8
12pm • TBA
ANTI WAR DEMONSTRATION: "STOP THE
INVASION AND OCCUPATION OF IRAQ!"

New Jersey Army National Guard Recruitment
Center, 120 Roseville Ave. Newark, NJ
973-801-0001

WED JULY 12 - 25
10am - 6pm • FREE
Opening Reception 7/12 @ 6 - 8pm
ART: 28 artists from across the US, Ireland
& Puerto Rico in Cooper Union Summer
Residency program.
Cooper Union's Foundation Building,
E 7th St., 5th & 6th fl. (btw. 3rd & 4th Aves.)

WED JULY 12
7 - 9pm • FREE
EDUCATING FOR GLOBAL PEACE, SPIRITUAL
& ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE &
JUSTICE LECTURE SERIES.
"Islamic Values & Transformative
Nonviolence: Are They Compatible?"
w/Ibrahim Malik Abdil-Mu'id Ramey
Teachers College, Columbia U. Milbank
Chapel, 125 Main Hall
RSVP: 212-678-8116, peace-ed@tc.edu

THURS JULY 13
7 - 8:30pm • Donation Suggested
EVENT: NYC TO NOLA – BRIDGES
CONNECTING WORKERS. Join New Orleans
Worker Justice Coalition (NOWJC) reps in
connecting post-Katrina Gulf Coast & NYC
workers. Meet organizers for New Orleans-
based Louisiana Workers Center. Video &
slideshow from New Orleans & info on
NYC worker empowerment efforts.
Cornell U-ILR School, 16 E 34th
St, 6th fl. (btw. 5th & Madison Aves.)
Info: marsha@abornotes.org

SAT JULY 15
7pm • \$5 Suggested
SCREENING: BLACK DIAMONDS
This film examines surface mining, mountaintop removal practices and radical
community resistance to mining destruction in
West Virginia. Bluestockings 172 Allen St.

THURS JULY 20
7PM • \$5 Suggested
TWO DOCUMENTARY SCREENINGS: "i", a
doc on Indymedia Argentina and their struggles
and triumphs amidst political turmoil
and a collapsing economy.
& a screening of "The Indypendent," a
short doc. about the people and process
behind New York City's radical independent
newspaper.
www.theindfilm.com • 212-777-6028
Bluestocking, 172 Allen St.

THURS JULY 27 - FRI JULY 28
BENEFIT: GALLERY SHOW FOR DANIEL
MCGOWAN. w/Armsrock, Arofish, Borf,
GoreB, Peter Kuper, Josh MacPhee, RB827,
Nicole Schulman, Chris Stain, Swoon, Seth
Tobocman, & many more. All proceeds go to
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activist McGowan's legal costs.
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visual.resistance@gmail.com

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JULY 17: *The Band Wagon*
JULY 24: *High Noon*
JULY 31: *A Shot in the Dark*

MOVIES AT SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
Films start at sunset, prescreen performances
at 7:30 • FREE
www.socratessculpturepark.org
718-956-1819
JULY 5: *Walkabout* (Australia)
JULY 12: *Wild Strawberries*
JULY 19: *Motorcycle Diaries*

ROOFTOP FILMS
All films start at dusk • \$10-\$15
see www.RooftopFilms.com for full schedule
and locations.

Tues, July 4 FUN WITH THE FOUNDING
FATHERS: Cheerful American dissidents and
adorable cartoons about war-mongers and
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Shorts program, plus music, comedy, fire-
works, and more!
at Solar One, 23rd st. at the East River.

Fri, July 7 RURAL ROUTE FILM FESTIVAL
Cow tipping, trailer parks, and lazy, cowardly
dogs. At the Automotive Highschool
50 Bedford Ave., btwn. N. 12 & Lorimer.

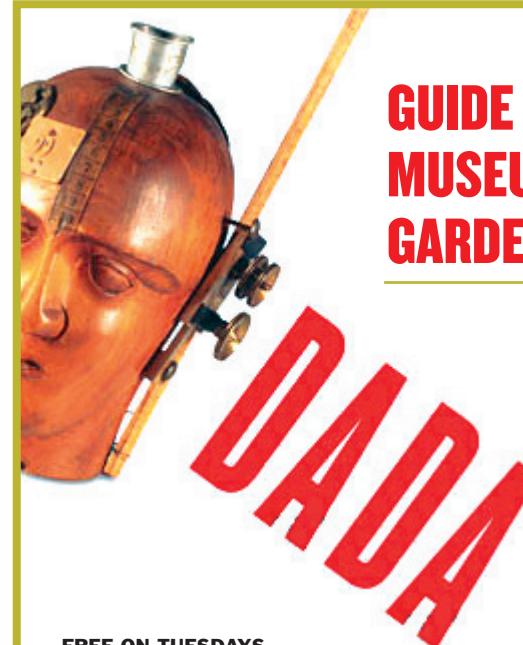
Sat, July 8 A Documentary feature:
LETTERS FROM THE OTHER SIDE Video letters
from Mexico tell the stories of women
left behind. Old Can Factory at 232 3rd St.
in Gowanus, Bkln.

**BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK
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July 7 – August 25 • Thursday nights
At this Dumbo park series, DJs spin music
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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MoMA)
4 – 8pm • 212-708-9400 • 11 West 53 St.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
4 – 8pm (galleries only) • 212-784-0077 • 35 Ave. at 36 St. in Astoria, NY

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